

A Beautiful Tradition: Adaptation and Ingenuity in a Century of Plateau Women's Art

LESSON PLAN 4th-5th Grades

Created by Laura Ferguson for the Montana Historical Society ©2009
For more information visit <http://mhs.mt.gov/education/default.asp>
or call 406-444-4789

Grade Levels: 4th-5th (*could be adapted for 6th-8th, as could the high school curriculum*)

Subject: Art (*could also use in Social Studies, MT history, Native American studies.*)

Time for Completion: two 45-minute class periods (*or 1 class period and 1 homework assignment*)

Overview

This unit provides an introduction to art of the Plateau region, primarily focusing on twined bags and beaded bags. It includes information on traditional Plateau art forms and artistic media that preceded beading; a brief history of the incorporation of beads into tribal art; and a look at styles, techniques, themes, and changes in Plateau beadwork through a visual gallery (PowerPoint slides) of artifacts. A comparison is made between traditional Plateau cornhusk-style bags and beaded bags in order to illustrate continuity of techniques and esthetic styles and motifs, as well as to reveal changes. Occasional contrasts to Plains-style arts are pointed out so that distinctions can be made.

The purpose of this lesson is threefold: 1) to demonstrate the continuity of cultural expression and aesthetics during a century of rapid change brought by colonialism and the reservation system; 2) to show how indigenous cultures adapted traditional skills to accommodate changes in resources, local economies and historical circumstances; and 3) to illustrate the processes by which an introduced medium such as glass beads can be incorporated into indigenous cultures in such a manner that the medium becomes an authentic form of native cultural and artistic expression that is important to cultural identity.

Montana Art Standards

Content Standard 2—Students apply and describe the concepts, structures and processes in the Arts. (Benchmarks: 2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.5)

Content Standard 5—Students understand the role of the Arts in society, diverse cultures, and historical periods. (Benchmarks: *all*)

Content Standard 6—Students make connections among the Arts, other subject areas, life, and work. (Benchmarks: 6.1, 6.2, 6.4)

Montana Indian Education for All Essential Understandings

Essential Understanding 1: There is great diversity among Montana's tribes.

Essential Understanding 2: There is great diversity among individual Indian people.

Objectives—In this unit, students will be able to

1. Locate the Plateau region on a map.
2. Identify several Plateau tribes, including three still living in Montana (Salish, Kootenai, and Pend d'Oreille).
3. Understand some of the regional and cultural differences between Plateau and Plains tribes.
4. Identify different types of Plateau art forms and artistic media.
5. Observe the continuity in artisans' utilization of available resources evident in traditional Plateau art, which extends to the incorporation of beads.
6. Identify compositional themes, design types, and techniques in Plateau beadwork, and define terms related to three-dimensional art and to beadwork and twined bags in particular.
7. Gain an introductory understanding of how changes in tribal economies and lifestyles resulting from Euro-American incursion into the West initiated changes in art (media, styles, composition function, etc.).
8. Recognize some of those changes in Plateau art, specifically between the 1880s and 1940s.
9. Understand how introduced materials, especially glass beads, have been incorporated into indigenous cultures in a manner that allows for continuity of an indigenous cultural aesthetic.
10. Appreciate the role of art and artistic expression in and to Native American peoples (past and present), and understand the importance of art to cultural and personal identity.

Materials Needed

- **"A Beautiful Tradition" CD of online resources**, which include PowerPoint slides, lesson plans, and worksheets.
- **Digital projector for viewing the accompanying PowerPoint**, or a computer lab if students are viewing the slideshow individually. (The slideshow could also be printed and hard copies distributed to the students, but the images are much better viewed on a computer in color. Additionally, this allows students to zoom in on details.)

- **Internet access** (needed if accessing additional resources or complementary curricula). Maps could be downloaded and printed, if necessary.
- **“Tradition, Design, Color: Plateau Indian Beaded Bags from the Fred Mitchell Collection”** – a catalog produced to accompany a temporary exhibit of Plateau women artists’ beaded bags, 1880-1940, at the Montana Historical Society, Helena, Montana, May 14, 2009 – October 3, 2009. To obtain complimentary copies of this exhibit catalog for use in the classroom, contact the Education Division of the Montana Historical Society at 444-4789. This Lesson Plan is designed to be used in conjunction with this exhibit catalog; however, if desired, this unit may also be used as a stand-alone lesson without the catalog.

Procedures

1. Print the WORKSHEETS and TEXT applicable to your grade level.
2. Show the PowerPoint slides to the students, narrating from the text.
3. Have the students complete the worksheets. You may want to print copies of the items they choose to assess.
4. Answer keys are provided.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Complementary Curricula

These are not required, but are suggested as complementary curricula which focus primarily on beadwork of Plains tribes. They can be viewed online and printed.

A Life in Beads: The Stories a Plains Dress Can Tell. This curriculum is available online at: http://www.nmai.si.edu/education.files/NMAI_lifeinbeads.pdf. It was created for use in **grades 4-6** by the National Museum of the American Indian, a branch of the Smithsonian Institute. It focuses on the Assiniboiné and Sioux tribes of Fort Peck, Montana, and includes a description of the processes of making a specific dress, the materials used, explanation of the artistic and symbolic decorations, and the incorporation of beads to the arts of the Northern Plains tribes. This resource is an excellent one if you are looking for a Plains Indian curriculum or to prepare students for a museum visit.

“Inspired by Our Lands...Made by Our Hands” by Cheryl Bannes. Available through the Montana Arts Council: www.art.mt.gov or 1-800-282-3092. Or contact Beck McLaughlin, Education Director of MT Arts Council: bemclaughlin@mt.gov. This curriculum focuses on Blackfeet-style beading techniques and designs. It includes a hands-on “doable” art project, aimed at **4th grade** level, but suitable for 2nd or 3rd grades as well. (Too simple for older grades.)

Montana's Office of Public Instruction, Indian Education Division can suggest complementary or supplementary **math curricula** related to beadwork, geometry, and patterning. Visit the OPI Indian Education website at <http://opi.mt.gov/IndianEd2/>. They can also suggest **new curriculum** made by the education and cultural committees of the Flathead Indian Reservation.

Online Exhibits and Resources

These are very good resources for photographs and further information if your students have time to browse through them or if you want additional info.

Burke Museum, University of Washington. Plateau Arts Gallery. Samples of Plateau arts, except cornhusk-style bags. Still a very good resource. Items grouped by media and type. <http://www.washington.edu/burkemuseum/collections/> Under "Research and Collections" click on "Ethnology," then type "Plateau" into search box.

Northwest Museum of Art and Culture in Spokane, Washington is an excellent repository of Plateau tribes' artifacts and arts. They have an online gallery as well as links to several other regional museums and galleries. <http://www.northwestmuseum.org> Go to the tab "Exhibits and Collections" at the top for some images; for their online digital collections, go to the "Research" tab, then click on "online resources."

Some of the useful links from the Northwest Museum's website are

American Indians of the Pacific Northwest

American Memory Project

Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest

Center for the Columbia River

University of Washington Digital Collections

Washington State University Digital Collections

Living Legacy: The American Indian Collection, a temporary exhibit, is at the Northwest Museum from July 2008, through July 18, 2010.

National Museum of the American Indian, <http://www.nmai.si.edu/> is part of the Smithsonian Institute and has digital collections for viewing as well as curriculum for all grade levels.

Maps— <http://content.lib.washington.edu/aipnw/maps.html>. The map called "Nez Perce and their neighbors" is the most accurate and gives a sense of the overlap of many tribes as well as the extensive territory of the Nez Perce, who frequently traded with the Crow/Apsaalooke (Plains) and interacted with the Shoshone (Great Basin). Not all tribes are named, but these maps give a good idea of who some of them are and where they are and were located. The first map in this series is just for reference—it is of tribes of the Pacific Northwest Coast. Please note that the term "Flathead" is often used to refer to the inland Salish.

For students interested in creating beadwork, or techniques and designs, as well as some history, these websites may be useful:

<http://www.nativetech.org/glasbead/glaswork.html>

http://www.kstrom.net/isk/art/beads/art_bea2.html

Montana Museums

Great fieldtrips! These are a few with native artifacts, including beadwork.

Montana Historical Society Museum, 225 N. Roberts St., Helena Montana, 59620.
Phone (406) 444-4789 or visit <http://mhs.mt.gov/education/default.asp>.

People's Center, Pablo, Montana.

Museum of the Plains Indian, Browning, Montana.

Fort Belknap Cultural Museum, Harlem, MT (Gros Ventre and Assiniboine).

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